

Message Text

SECRET

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S E C R E T PARIS 00988

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: FR, MO, MR, AG
SUBJ: SAHARA: FRENCH SEE POLISARIO MILITARILY CHECKED
FOR TIME BEING

REF: ALGIERS 3161

1. ON JANUARY 11 WE DISCUSSED WITH QUAI DEPUTY
DIRECTOR FOR FRANCOPHONE AFRICA DE LA ROCHERE LATEST
NORTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF
THE FRENCH HOSTAGES OF THE POLISARIO AND FRENCH AERIAL
INTERVENTION. DE LA ROCHERE SAID THAT THE FRENCH
MILITARY WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS OF THE
DECEMBER 12/13 AND DECEMBER 18 AIR ATTACKS ON
POLISARIO COLUMNS. THE POLISARIO HAD BEEN BADLY
HURT AND THERE HAD BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT POLISARIO
ATTACKS (THEIR COMMUNIQUE NOTWITHSTANDING) SINCE
DECEMBER 18.

2. DE LA ROCHERE SAID THAT FRENCH AERIAL RECONNAIS-
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SANCE WAS EXCELLENT AND THAT IT WAS NO LONGER POSSIBLE
FOR LARGE POLISARIO COLUMNS TO MOVE INTO POSITION FOR
ATTACKS IN MAURITANIA WITHOUT DETECTION AND THE RISK
OF BEING BLASTED AGAIN. (THE ONLY EXCEPTION WOULD BE
DURING SAND STORMS.) ADDITIONALLY, MOROCCAN TROOPS
WERE IN PLACE AT MANY LOCATIONS IN MAURITANIA AND,
THOUGH THE MOROCCAN TROOPS MIGHT NOT BE A MATCH FOR

THE POLISARIO IN DESERT COMBAT, THEY WERE WELL-TRAINED AND DISCIPLINED AND GOOD IN STATIC DEFENSE. HE BELIEVES IT LIKELY THAT THE IRON ORE INSTALLATIONS AND RAILROAD WILL HAVE A RESPITE FROM ATTACK UNTIL THE POLISARIO COMES UP WITH A NEW TACTIC SINCE THEIR PREVIOUS (VERY EFFECTIVE) ONE WAS NO LONGER WORKABLE.

3. DE LA ROCHERE WAS CAUTIOUS IN HIS OPTIMISM AND DID NOT PROFESS TO SEE A TURNING POINT IN THE WAR. HE NOTED, FOR INSTANCE, THAT THE BUILDING UP OF THE MAURITANIAN ARMY WAS PROCEEDING VERY SLOWLY. AN ADDITIONAL POSITIVE SIGN, HOWEVER, WAS THE VERY FAVORABLE REACTION OF THE MAURITANIAN POPULATION TO THE ACTIVE FRENCH INTERVENTION. ONE RESULT WAS MANIFESTLY WARMER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FRENCH "COOPERANTS" AND THE LOCAL POPULATION. ANOTHER OF POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE WAS THE RESURFACING OF TRADITIONAL ANIMOSITY BETWEEN THE POPULATION OF NORTHERN MAURITANIA AND THE REGUIBAT TRIBESMAN WHO STILL CONSTITUTE THE BACKBONE OF THE POLISARIO FIGHTING FORCES.

4. WITHOUT CITING A SOURCE (REFTEL) WE RAISED WITH DE LA ROCHERE THE QUESTION OF THE DEGREE OF DEPENDENCY OF THE POLISARIO ON ALGERIA. DE LA ROCHERE SAID THAT THERE ARE EVIDENTLY TWO TENDENCIES WITHIN THE POLISARIO ONE OF WHICH FAVORS GREATER
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INDEPENDENCE FROM THE GOA. HE DID NOT ELABORATE.

5. COMMENT: THE INSISTENCE OF VARIOUS FRENCH OFFICIALS ON ALGERIAN CONTROL OVER POLISARIO ACTIVITIES TENDS TO OBSCURE THE FACT OF SENSITIVE APPRECIATION BY QUAI OFFICIALS OF THE SUBTLETIES OF SAHARAN POLITICS. ALL SEEM TO BE AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT WHATEVER INDEPENDENT TENDENCIES EXIST WITHIN THE POLISARIO IT COULD NOT BE AN EFFECTIVE MILITARY (AND HENCE POLITICAL) FACTOR WITHOUT LARGE SCALE DIRECT ALGERIAN MILITARY SUPPORT. BECAUSE OF THIS DEPENDENCY, THE POLISARIO MUST ACCEPT ALGERIAN DIRECTION OF THEIR ACTIVITIES. THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENT TENDENCIES WITHIN THE POLISARIO AND AMONGST THE SAHARAN PEOPLE GENERALLY IS NOT THEREFORE SEEN AS IMMEDIATELY RELEVANT THOUGH THERE IS GROWING CONCERN THAT BOUMEDIENE MAY BE SETTING IN MOTION A PROCESS WITH SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR ALL OF NORTHERN AFRICA AT SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE.
HARTMAN

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